

STUDYING ENGLISH BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Being the international language, learning English is one of the most sought after skills across the world. The curriculums of many schools in Europe and around the world prioritise the learning of English as much as mathematics, natural sciences and reading and writing in their native language. For many though, a poor experience at school, insufficient teaching methods or the passage of time mean that they find themselves, in adulthood, trying to acquire this skill. This can be a rather daunting task however, as the English idiom goes “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks”, certainly when people leave school, learning English can become more difficult. We now work busy jobs, have family commitments and any precious free time we would rather spend on a form of relaxation. Additionally, returning to the classroom, as a student can be a regressive experience.

In addition to all of the above points, the biggest news story of last year, the covid 19 pandemic, created even more disruption than usual, so even those who used to attend many of the adult English courses available, found their study moving to new platforms or cancelling altogether. So if attending English courses is not a preferable option what other methods are there, and what are their advantages and disadvantages. In this article I’ll outline some of the most common methods for studying English, beyond the setting of a traditional classroom.

Online courses

The use of video conferencing software to give English lessons has been around for many years. In fact, I have been using skype for English lessons for many years, to expand my portfolio of students beyond Nikolaev. The pandemic last year introduced even more students and teachers to this way of learning, as government restrictions meant face to face lessons were prohibited. As previously mentioned, Skype, is one of the most well known programmes for this type of

conferencing, to the extent that ‘to skype someone’ is regularly used as a verb in Great Britain, however there are many other variants including: zoom, which became popular since the start of quarantine restrictions last year, Google meets and Microsoft teams. The main advantage to conducting English lessons in this manner, is that it retains most of the advantages of visiting your teacher face to face. You can see and hear your teacher, who can give you instant feedback and features such as the “whiteboard” and “screenshare” enable teachers to demonstrate what they are teaching, similar to as if they were in the classroom. In addition to these benefits, which you would find in the live classroom, lessons can be conducted from your own home, removing that necessity to travel to a language school. However as with all technology it can come at a price. Firstly, it is necessary to have the required, and expensive equipment, such as a laptop, computer, microphone and webcam. In the majority of countries and especially for those in moderate income jobs, this isn’t such a big drawback, as most likely this equipment is necessary for other aspects of life, and the programmes themselves are free. However, many teachers will tell you that this technology is not a perfect substitute for teaching in the classroom. Technological problems can often occur making communication strained between participants, and even when it is working perfectly, especially with multiple students, the noise from everyone's microphones can be a cacophony. However for the individual student this is certainly no problem and many teachers as well as students were thankful for this technology in the time of the pandemic.

On-Demand courses

If struggling with online programmes such as Skype or zoom aren’t for you, another option that has recently come to popularity are on-demand courses. The market leader in this field is the website “Udemy”. In principle these sites work by other users, teachers, creating courses in the form of video and in some cases with accompanying worksheets. The number of courses is not limited to English either, you can study anything from other foreign languages, to programming, to mathematics and physics at any level. For English alone there are over 8’000

different course to choose from, for different levels and English for particular specialities, or purposes. The format of these courses is most suitable for those with very hectic schedules who can only dedicate a small fraction of their time to study. Because of the use of video lessons, they can be stopped and started as you please, you can repeat and replay that which you didn't understand to pick it up a second time, and you will always have the videos available. The biggest drawback is notably the price. Courses range from \$20 - \$200+, even face to face English courses can be cheaper, and these on-demand courses lack the personal interaction with an English teacher. However, often Udemy has promotions, that you can find from their website or on facebook, this will significantly reduce the cost.

Language Learning Apps

In recent years the development of mobile telecoms and smartphones has allowed us to use many programmes (apps) which have assisted us, taught us and entertained us. On google play or iOS there are many such apps that help to learn foreign languages, including English. The most well known are Babbel, Busuu, Memrise and Duolingo. The main advantage of such apps is the ability to learn at any time, in any place for as long as you want. On most apps the learning experience comprises of a few short exercises in the form of a quiz or a game which helps the user to memorise useful phrases. Some have the ability to talk with other users of the app, who are native speakers of your target language and do a language exchange. They are useful, convenient and in some cases fun, however the range of language that can be learned is limited. It might be useful for you if you are planning to go abroad for a holiday and wish to learn some new phrases but for more intense study they can often be found lacking.

Conclusion

Many of us are busy, and despite our best efforts finding the time and resources to learn and perfect a language can be difficult. However, I hope this article helps you realise that there are more options outside the traditional classroom. For those who want as much of the school experience as possible from the comfort of your home, you should consider finding an online teacher using

video conferencing software such as Skype or Zoom. If you have more money to spend but less time to spend it, on-demand courses are available from sites such as Udemy, where you can learn the nuances of English at your own pace. Finally for those who aren't looking to speak fluently but just want to boost their vocabulary, try downloading an app such as Duolingo or others, which will enable you to study casually in an entertaining way.

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HOW TO COOPERATE WELL WITH THE SCHOOL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The new daily school routines, with home schooling via the internet, puts the cooperation between teachers and parents to a new test. Here are some good advices.

- Parents must answer calls from or get in touch with school and the teachers whenever necessary and attend meetings at school at any time they will open again.
- This is of great importance to be able to follow up your own child in a good way and to create good relations between parents, teachers and the student.

These are excerpts from the book “Good Parental Relations. School-Home-Cooperation in the Primary School” by Rector *Pernille Grepp Knutsen* and Associate Professor *Cecilie Pedersen Dalland* at the Norwegian Institute for Primary School and Specialist Teacher Education.

“It is essential to construct a common platform between school and home, so that both students and parents are updated and confident about what is happening at school” – *Cecilie Pedersen Dalland.*